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In a project to help all professional members of a junior high school staff improve their group processes, a series of training interventions were spaced throughout the school year to increase their organizational abilities. Two days of a six-day summer workshop were spent in structured game-like exercises designed to increase awareness of interpersonal work processes.. In the remaining days, the faculty moved through a problemsolving sequence, working on issues they thought were thwarting the organizational functioning of the school: insufficient role clarity; failure to draw upon staff resources; low staff involvement; and low participation at meetings of committees and area groups. A three-day December intervention included communication exercises, problemsolving techniques, decisionmaking procedures, and skill development in group observations and feedback. The two-day session in February took stock of how the staff had progressed in solving problems of resource use, role clarity, and staff participation. Questionnaires, interviews, written reactions, and observations revealed that substantial organizational change had occurred during the year; more faculty members were involved more in organizational problemsolving and decisionmaking after the training than before. The project was also evaluated with a pretest-posttest design which included several comparison schools. (JS)

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Developing Teacher Decision-Making Through Process Interventions[1]

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The special concern of this project was to help all professional members of a Junior High School staff improve their group processes so as to become better problem-solvers and decision-makers. We assumed that the management of school deals with organizational issues that arise in some fashion; and, at some point, every professional in the school gets involved in managing it by working on its problems and by deciding on new actions to take. Through our intervention, we intended to increase the organizational abilities of the faculty to meet different problems. We felt that effective problem-solving and decision-making would be demonstrated by the school's independently identifying the distinctiveness of different organizational problems, defining appropriate and relevant resources for confronting problems, marshalling resources so that they are brought to bear effectively and doing all of this on a continuing basis.

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[1]This project is reported in a much more complete form in Schmuck, R. and Runkel, P., Organizational Training for A School Faculty. Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, in press. This brief summary has been prepared for presentation at the 1969 meetings of the American Educational Research Association in Los Angeles, California.

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Our intervention focused on improving the communication, problem-solving, and decision-making processes used by the staff, with emphasis placed on the processes and not on any particular communication problem or decision content. We did not suggest solutions for instance, or become concerned with changing organizational structure directly. Nor did we suggest any technological or curricular changes.

The process intervention that we did employ involved a sequence generally as follows: First, through structured game-like, small group exercises, discrepancies were revealed to staff members between their ideal and actual ways of working. Members were then asked to confront one another by discussing similarities and differences between what was happening in the exercise and what typically happens at the school. Next, small groups of staff members discussed ways in which their current relationships within the school's daily operation contribute to these discrepancies. The motivation for change that was created from a desire to reduce this discrepancy was harnessed by showing staff members that a systematic problem-solving procedure can be helpful in seeking new ways of working together. Finally, new organizational procedures were generated by staff members out of the problem-solving procedure. Through learning how to communicate and solve problems more effectively, staff members typically were led to suggest and implement changes in the school's organization.

Process interventions of the type we carried out focus on the total organization of the school in contrast to the personal development of individuals. The school is viewed as a complex social system stabilized by role expectations and interpersonal norms. Individual faculty members behave predictably largely because of their adherence to shared expectations for what is appropriate school behavior. Norms are compelling stabilizers

because individuals in the school monitor one another's behaviors. It is the strength of shared expectations or norms that makes a school organization so resistant to modification, but, at the same time, offers a tool for planned change. If organizational change is to be viable and stable, changes in interpersonal expectations must be shared so that each person knows that his colleagues have changed their expectations in the same way that he has changed his own.

The training events of this project were designed to have their primary effect on the actual, intact faculty as a working group. Almost the entire building staff except for students was included. There were 54 trainees: all administrators, all faculty but two, and the head cook, head custodian, and head secretary. Further, the design did not call for permanent groupings during training. Rather, participants rotated from group to group to increase contact with the entire staff, making it possible for the participants to gain a more comprehensive view of and identification with the entire faculty. Finally, the training was spaced over the greater part of the school year so that the orientations and skills learned during the first (and most concentrated) training episode could be guided in direct application as well as periodically refreshed and re-directed.

The training began with a six-day summer workshop which was completed before school began in August, 1967. Goals of this first training event included increased openness and ease of interpersonal relations, clearer and more effective staff communication, increased willingness and skill in giving and receiving feedback, and more effective group problem-solving.

The first two days were spent in structured exercises designed to increase awareness of interpersonal work processes. Although these exercises were game-like, they demonstrated the importance of clear and effective

communication for accomplishing a task collaboratively. After each exercise, small groups discussed the ways in which the experience was similar or different from what usually happens at the school. Each small group chose its own way to report what it had experienced, but all staff members eventually pooled their experiences and analyzed their relationships as a total faculty. The trainers emphasized openness, clear communications, overcoming difficulties in listening and skills in describing another's behavior.

During the remaining four days the faculty moved through a problem-solving sequence, working on issues they thought were thwarting the organizational functioning of the school. Three problems emerged as the most significant:

Insufficient role clarity--especially in the roles of principal, vice-principal, counselors, and area (departmental) coordinators.

Failure to draw upon staff resources--especially between academic areas, but also within subject matter specialties.

Low staff involvement and low participation at meetings of committees, area groups, and the full faculty.

Three problem-solving groups formed to work on one of these problems. Each commenced a procedure involving five steps: identifying the problem through behavioral description, diagnostic force-field analysis, brainstorming to find actions likely to reduce restraining forces, designing a concrete plan of action, and trying out the plan behaviorally through a simulation activity involving the entire staff.

The group concerned with role clarification initiated actions to increase trust among the faculty. The group on using staff resources set up eight sub-groups, each of which was to pretend to be a junior high school staff meeting a crisis due to lack of books; each group then developed curricula by drawing upon one another's resources. The group on low

staff involvement arranged for three groups to have discussions on role clarification, staff resources, and staff involvement. During the discussions, 'high talkers' were asked one after another to stop participating until there were only two members left. Discussions were then held in each group on "feelings toward involvement on the staff."

The summer workshop culminated with a discussion to highlight resources on the staff. Staff members described their own strengths and those of their colleagues. Finally, they discussed what the School could be like if all strengths were used.

During the early fall, all faculty members were interviewed and observations were made of a number of committees and subject-area groups to determine what uses were being made of workshop experiences. Data indicated that problems still unresolved were communicative misunderstandings, role overload, and group problem-solving capabilities. The second training intervention with the entire staff was held December 1 and 2, 1967. The goals of this session were:

to increase the effectiveness of the area (departmental) coordinators as communication links between teachers and administrators,

to increase problem-solving skills of the area groups and the principal's advisory committee,

to help the faculty explore ways of reducing role overload, and,

to increase effective communication between service personnel and the rest of the staff.

Training activities included communication exercises, problem-solving techniques, decision-making procedures, and skill development in group observations and feedback. On the first day, area groups applied problem-solving techniques to their own communication difficulties and received

feedback from an observing area group on their methods of work. Problems raised in area groups were brought the next day to a meeting of the Principal's Advisory Committee held in front of the rest of the staff. Staff observed the Advisory Committee, participated in specially designed ways, and later gave feedback on how effectively the committee had worked and how accurately members had represented them.

The third training intervention took place on February 9 and 10, 1968. The main objective was to take stock of how the staff had progressed since the summer workshop in solving problems of using resources, role clarity, and staff participation, and to revivify any lagging skills. A group discussion of each problem area was held. Teachers went to the group considering the problem that most interested them. Each group discussed the positive and negative outcomes associated with its problem. For example, in the group discussing staff participation, the question was: "In what ways has staff participation improved and where has it failed to improve? Give examples of improvements, no change, and regression in staff participation." The groups focused on the negative instances and tried to think of ways to eliminate them by modifying organizational processes in the school. Faculty members continued with this activity in small groups during spring, 1968.

The organizational changes that occurred during the year were substantial. They were documented through questionnaires, interviews, written reactions, and observations. The project was also evaluated with a pre-test-post-test design which included several comparison schools.

Some of the significant changes were as follows: During the academic year, revised roles involving "link-pin functions" were designed for the area coordinators and put into practice. Periodic open meetings of the

Principal's Advisory Committee were tried out. The faculty also originated a request for further training in organizational processes in the summer of 1968 and specified the goals for the training. One area group requested that a new chairman be appointed because their chairman had acquired too many additional duties. The principal asked the school district for another Assistant Principal whose role would be to coordinate team teaching operations and to pay part of his expenses for further group training with the National Training Laboratories at Cedar City in the summer of 1968. Both requests were granted. Six members of the faculty attended a workshop in group dynamics at the University of Oregon in the summer of 1968 at their own expense. Three members of the staff reported the experience to the Research Division of the Oregon Educational Association and the principal was invited to give an account to the annual meetings of the Oregon Psychological Association. About 19 teachers reported effects on their teaching; at least 15 made deliberate changes in their style of classroom management; the new methods emphasized using resources residing in students and other teachers as well as mutual help among students. The annual turnover of teacher personnel at the school was considerably lower in June of 1968 than it had been in June of 1967, and was lower than any of the other junior high schools in the district. Finally, the accuracy with which faculty members perceived the communication channels for important matters increased during the year. At the same time, communication involving the key persons in the organization seemed to increase, while the formal authority structure stayed very much the same.

Using questionnaire items from Neil Gross's scale of Executive Professional Leadership for the purpose of ascertaining the ways teachers saw themselves interacting with the principal, we found very strong and

favorable changes reported by the staff concerning their principal. During a comparable period the year before, faculties in six junior high schools in the New York area reported no better than weak positive changes on the part of their principals and in a couple of cases strong negative changes. Using a questionnaire about staff meetings developed by Matt Miles and others in the Cooperative Project for Educational Development, the faculty reported strong improvements in staff meetings during the year. In three junior high schools of the New York area, changes were weak and mixed.

In comparison with four junior high schools near "Western City," this staff reported relatively more innovations having taken place that required new arrangements for interpersonal processes, innovations in solving problems or making decisions, and innovations in organizational structure. The other schools reported relatively more innovations of the "packageable" sort -- activities for which there is some tangible set of materials, specifications for a new job, TV equipment, or instructions for a bookkeeping method.

The perceived norms for faculty interaction in this school were very different at the end of the year from the norms reported in the four junior high schools near Western City. Compared to the other schools, more of this faculty believed their colleagues to be ready to seek out another teacher to discuss a disagreement that had arisen, more believed their colleagues would <u>not</u> keep a disagreement to themselves and say nothing about it, more believed colleagues would tell another teacher if they felt hurt at something the other teacher had said, more would disapprove of a committee member who insisted on keeping the discussion objective and impersonal, and so forth. A few items gave mixed or weak comparisons. We also found that the percentages of respondents giving answers of "I don't know" or skipping

the item decreased in the cases of 11 items out of 12.

The patterns of results revealed by these organizational events and changes as well as the questionnaires are mutually supporting and positive. The group process intervention employed here brought about organizational improvements in the school. Specifically, more faculty members were involved more in organizational problem-solving and decision-making after the training than were before the training.

Summary of Training Events
for
Developing Teacher Decision-Making Through
Process Interventions

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(Handout for 1969 Meetings of AERA)

August, 1967 Workshop

Monday:

Morning, Trip Across the Moon Group

Exercise (Using resources in a group effectively).

Afternoon, Reactions to Moon Exercise (how similar were the behaviors during this exercise to the way they usually occur in the school?)

Evening, Five Square Puzzle (coordination and cooperation in a group task).

Tuesday:

Morning, Non-verbal Expressive Activities (artistic production that represented images of the School).

Afternoon, Hollow Square Exercise (using a formal hierarchy in group problem-solving).

Evening, Listening Skills and Practice in Helping Others Communicate.

Wednesday:

Morning, Identification of Organizational Problems at the School.

Afternoon, Introduction of Problem-Solving Sequences.

Thursday and Friday:

The Problem Solving Sequence was Carried out in Three Groups. The problems were:

--Insufficient role clarity
--Failure to draw upon staff resources
--Low staff involvement and low participation at meetings

Saturday:

Identification of Strengths (resources) on the Faculty.

Training During 1967-68 School Year

December, Session with Entire Staff

Friday afternoon, area groups observing each other do problem solving.

Saturday morning, simulated meeting of the Principal's Advisory Committee in presence of the staff.

Saturday afternoon, feedback from staff to Principal's Advisory Committee.

January, Session with Principal's Advisory Committee

Session on group and organizational decision-making.

February, Session with Entire Staff

Progress report on problem-solving during the school year.

February, Session with Principal's Advisory Committee

Exploring interpersonal relations difficulties in the group and between the group and others in the building.